Darling, a political cartoonist for the Des Moines Leader and Register in Des Moines, Iowa, was the man—the action took several forms. Needed was information for managing wildlife populations and habitats for sustained production and a means to educate a cadre of individuals to understand and to use the information properly. The "doing something" turned out to be the beginnings of the cooperative wildlife research units.

Cooperative Wildlife Research Units

Iowa Led the Way

Darling's push for conservation reforms in Iowa had provided the groundwork for his being named the first chairperson of the Iowa Fish and Game Commission. His recognition of the need for biological information, trained wildlife managers, and dissemination of information to management agencies led to his negotiation of an agreement among the Iowa State College, the Iowa Fish and Game Commission, and Darling to form and support the first cooperative wildlife research unit. In 1932, Darling pledged $3,000 of his personal funds to finance operations for each of 3 successive years. This was an obvious measure of Darling's commitment to wildlife conservation because $3,000 in 1932 could have purchased a significant amount of Iowa farm acreage. Dr. Paul Errington, one of Aldo Leopold's students, was recruited in summer 1933 as leader of this cooperative wildlife research unit in an academic department located at Iowa State College in Ames.

Because of Darling's dedication to wildlife conservation, Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, from Iowa, suggested to President Franklin Roosevelt that Darling be nominated director of the Federal Bureau of Biological Survey. President Roosevelt approached Darling with a personal telephone call. After some consternation and consideration of the personal financial sacrifice, Darling agreed. On 10 March 1934, Darling was appointed Director of the Bureau of Biological Survey, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Years later, the Bureau of Biological Survey was transferred to the Department of the Interior and became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, then the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and again renamed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The National Cooperative Unit Program

As director of the Bureau of Biological Survey, Darling lobbied the Congress for support of nationwide cooperative wildlife research units. He also began searching for support for units from other sources. Darling invited distinguished guests to a dinner meeting at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York on 24 April 1935 to solicit their philosophical and financial support of a program to produce wildlife biologists and biological information for management of the nation's wildlife. The purpose was to present and to discuss Darling's concept of cooperative units. Before the meeting, Darling worked with conservation departments and land-grant universities in several states